

# *The Three Ecumenical Councils*

## **1. The First Ecumenical Council**

Year: 325 A.D.

Place: Nicea

Emperor: St. Constantine the Great

Presiding Bishop:

Number of Bishops Attended: 318

Background:

Formulated first part of Creed, refuted the teachings of Arius and defined the divinity of the Son of God.

The Arian Controversy: Arius denied the divinity of Christ. If Jesus was born, then there was a time when He did not exist. If He became God, then there was a time when He was not. The Council declared Arius' teaching a heresy, unacceptable to the Church and decreed that Christ is God. He is of the same essence [homoousios] with God the Father.

The Creed: The first part of the seven articles of the Creed were ratified at the First Ecumenical. The text reads as follows:

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ek tes ousias] of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father [homoousion to patri], through whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and our salvation descended, was incarnate, and was made man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven and cometh to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit. Those who say: There was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was begotten; and that He was made out of nothing [ek ouk onton]; or who maintain that He is of another hypostasis or another substance [than the Father], or that the Son of God is created, or mutable, or subject to change, [them] the Catholic Church anathematizes.”

## **2. The Second Ecumenical Council**

Year: 381 A.D.

Place: Constantinople

Emperor: St. Theodosius the Great

Presiding Bishop: St. Melitos Patriarch of Antioch / St. Gregory the Theologian

Number of Bishops Attended: 150

Background:

Macedonius, somewhat like Arius, was misinterpreting the Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit was not a person [hypostasis], but simply a power [dynamic] of God. Therefore the Spirit was inferior to the Father and the Son. The Council condemned Macedonius' teaching and defined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Council decreed that there is one God in three persons [hypostases]: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Fathers of the Council added five articles to the Nicene creed regarding the Holy Spirit, the Church, Baptism and Resurrection.

### **3. The Third Ecumenical Council**

Year: 431 A.D.

Place: Ephesus

Emperor: Theodosius II

Presiding Bishop: St. Cyril of Alexandria

Number of Bishops Attended: 200

Background:

The Nestorian Controversy: It concerned the nature of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Nestorius [the heretic] taught that the Virgin Mary gave birth to a man, Jesus Christ, not God, the "Logos," "the Word, Son of God." The Logos only dwelled in Christ, as in a Temple (Christ, therefore, was only Theophoros: The "Bearer of God." Consequently, the Virgin Mary should be called "Christotokos," the Mother of Christ and not "Theotokos," "Mother of God." Hence, the name, "Christological controversies." Nestorianism over emphasized the human nature of Christ at the expense of the divine. The Council denounced Nestorius' teaching as erroneous. Our Lord Jesus Christ is one person, not two separate "people": the Man, Jesus Christ and the Son of God, Logos. The Council decreed that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Logos), is complete God and complete man, with a rational soul and body. The Virgin Mary is "Theotokos" because she gave birth not to man but to God who became man.

The Creed: The Council declared the text of the "Creed" decreed at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils to be complete and forbade and change (addition or deletion).

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Note: All background info. taken from the "Domar" of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, 2003 by the Armenian Orthodox Theological Research Institute (AOTRI), 2002.